WORKPLACE INSPECTIONS

What is a Workplace Inspection?
A workplace inspection is a planned walk-through of a workplace or selected areas or locations of a workplace. Inspections are needed to critically examine all factors (worksite, equipment, materials, practices, procedures) that have the potential to cause injury or illness, and to identify where action is necessary to control hazards. A schedule of planned inspections is an essential element of a health and safety program in which standards are established and compliance monitored.

Who should Conduct Inspections?
The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* places responsibility on a worker health and safety representative to conduct an inspection of physical conditions. However, the employer still has the prime responsibility for providing a healthy and safe workplace. The implementation of effective and regular inspections is one way in which an employer's general legal duties may be met. However, a joint inspection, consisting of both management and worker representatives, would be in keeping with the participative approach of the Act.

How often should Inspections be Conducted?
The worker health and safety representative must inspect the workplace at least once a month. However, if this is not practical, he or she shall inspect the physical condition of the workplace at least once a year, inspecting at least a part of it every month. The inspection must be conducted according to a schedule set by the joint health and safety committee or, in smaller workplaces of 6 to 19 employees, by the employer and health and safety representative.

Preparing for the Inspection
The success of workplace inspections depends on having the necessary information. There should also be an overall system of management controls which is flexible enough to allow for changes to be made, for example in equipment or work practices, when needed. To properly identify hazards, the person or persons conducting the inspection should have the necessary training, which should include:

- the potential hazards associated with the various machinery, equipment, materials, and processes;
- existing controls, applicable standards and regulations;
- how to use the information from: Ministry of Labour inspection reports/orders; results of previous inspections; accident data; maintenance reports.

Conducting the Inspection
To ensure that all items are covered during the inspection, it is useful to develop checklists which contain reference, in point form, to all potential hazards. These checklists should never be considered as permanent lists. They should be reviewed and added to or revised as necessary – for example, when machinery or processes are changed or when accident experience reveals previously unsuspected hazards.

Recording Observation
It is necessary to review all the information collected and rank each issue in terms of its importance. All identified hazards should be classified A, B, or C:

Class "A" Hazard – Correct Immediately
A condition or practice likely to cause permanent disability, loss of life or body part, and/or extensive loss of structure, equipment or material.

Class "B" Hazard – Correct As Soon As Possible
A condition or practice likely to cause serious injury or illness, resulting in temporary disability or property damage that is disruptive but not extensive.

Class "C" Hazard – Correct as Soon As Practicable
A condition or practice likely to cause minor, non-disabling injury or illness, or non-disruptive property damage.

Although the law does not specify an official reporting form, a good form is valuable in ensuring that management, and others responsible for follow up, are made aware of problems. Such a form can also serve as a valuable reference for spot inspections and periodic checks by the supervisor, as well as for review by the joint health and safety committee.

Review/Follow Up
After each inspection, it is important that the information obtained is given careful consideration and, where indicated, corrective action taken. The results of inspections are indicators of the success or failure of management policies and practices and should be examined for possible changes. Although all identified hazards should ultimately be eliminated or minimized, the responsible supervisor or manager must be informed of hazards posing an immediate danger so that corrective action can be taken quickly.

The information obtained from regular inspections should also be reviewed carefully to identify trends and to help monitor the effectiveness of a company's health and safety program. Over a period of time, this review will help:

- highlight the need for training in certain areas;
- provide insight as to why accidents are occurring in certain areas;
- establish priorities for corrective action;
- establish or improve safe work practices;
- indicate areas, equipment, etc., which may require more in-depth hazard analysis.

Resource Materials - Ontario Ministry of Labour
- Occupational Health and Safety Act and Regulations for Industrial Establishments.
- Guide to the Occupational Health and Safety Act
- Guide for Joint Health and Safety Committees and Representatives in the Workplace